

Deborah Frenkel

Daniel Gray-Barnett



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Publisher's blurb

One thing about dad-ing: there's all kinds of ways . . . Some dads are born and some dads are made.

From the bestselling author Deborah Frenkel and award-winning illustrator Daniel Gray-Barnett comes a heartfelt celebration of fatherhood.

A joyful ode to dads' special knack for turning ordinary days into awesome ones.

Synopsis

The Thing About Dads is a warm, playful and heartfelt celebration of fathers and father figures in their many different forms. Through gentle rhyming text and expressive illustrations, the story explores the many ways dads care for, encourage, protect and connect with the children they love. Some dads tell terrible jokes, some dream up wild adventures, some offer comfort in the middle of the night and some simply make ordinary days feel extraordinary.

As the story unfolds, readers discover that there is no single way to be a dad. Some dads are born and some dads are made, but all share the same deep love and pride for their children.



Writing style

The writing is playful, rhythmic and shows great affection for dads. The text uses rhyme and repetition to create a warm read-aloud quality. Many lines balance humour with tenderness, capturing both the silly and comforting sides of fatherhood. The language is accessible for younger readers while still rich with imagery, humour and emotion. The repeated phrase 'The thing about dads' gives the story structure and helps to reinforce the book's central message that love can be expressed in many ways.

Illustration style

The illustrations are lively, expressive and full of warmth and movement. Loose lines, soft textures and vibrant colours create a playful visual world that is energetic and emotionally rich. The illustrations often extend the humour of the text, adding visual jokes and imaginative details. The illustrations celebrate diversity and inclusion, showing a wide range of families, cultures, abilities and experiences.



About the author

Deborah Frenkel is an awarded writer of picture books and an as-yet-unawarded starrer-outer-er of windows. Her books include 2025's CBCA and ABIA Picture Book of the Year and National Simultaneous Storytime title *The Truck Cat* (illustrated by Danny Snell), as well as *How to Get Home*, *100 School Days*, *The Sydney Harbour Fairy*, *Boldilocks* and *Naturopolis*. She lives on Bunurong land in Melbourne, with her family and an enormous tuxedo cat who loves staring out of windows, too.

Author motivation

Dads can be full of contradictions and surprises, silliness and strangeness, but the bond we share with them is lifelong.

The Thing About Dads celebrates all the little things that make our dads so special and it also reflects the different ways to be a father today. It's really a celebration of all the different kinds of dads and a reflection of the wide range of different family arrangements, including families where a dad is the primary carer, step families and families with two dads.



About the illustrator

Daniel Gray-Barnett is an award-winning illustrator and author who lives in the Huon Valley in lutruwita/Tasmania. Self-taught, he studied Medical Science at the University of Sydney before swapping his microscope for pencils when he realised illustration had a much lower patient mortality rate. He now works across a range of projects with clients in advertising, editorial and publishing. His first book *Grandma Z* won the Children's Book Council of Australia award for Best New Illustrator. It was also featured in the Society of Illustrators' Original Art and annual shows and was chosen by the International Youth Library as one of 2019's White Ravens.

Illustrator motivation

I'm a dad to two young kids – a four-year-old and a one-year-old, who was born while I was working on this book – so my role and responsibility of being a father was very present. I spent a lot of time wrestling with being a parent, especially with two kids. It's hard! It really showed me a lot of my flaws and shortcomings as a person and man. Working on the book was a way to embrace and fall in love with my identity of being a dad.

I'm also part of a family with two gay dads, and we had our kids via a surrogate here in Australia. We're a modern family that doesn't have the typical old-fashioned gender stereotypes; we have two different kinds of dads that fill all the different roles needed in our family.



Themes



DADS AND FATHER FIGURES



DIFFERENT KINDS OF
FAMILIES



LOVE AND BELONGING



FINDING MAGIC IN
ORDINARY MOMENTS



IMAGINATION AND PLAY



DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION



EMOTIONAL CONNECTION



Australian curriculum links

English

- Listening and responding to stories
- Discussing characters and relationships
- Sharing personal experiences
- Identifying how illustrations add meaning
- Retelling events in sequence
- Exploring descriptive language and repetition

HASS (Humanities and Social Sciences)

- Families and family structures
- People who care for us
- Similarities and differences between families
- Roles within families and communities

Personal and social capability

- Developing empathy
- Recognising caring relationships
- Expressing feelings and gratitude
- Appreciating diversity

The arts

- Drawing and creating portraits of families
- Exploring colour and emotion in illustrations
- Dramatic play and role-play

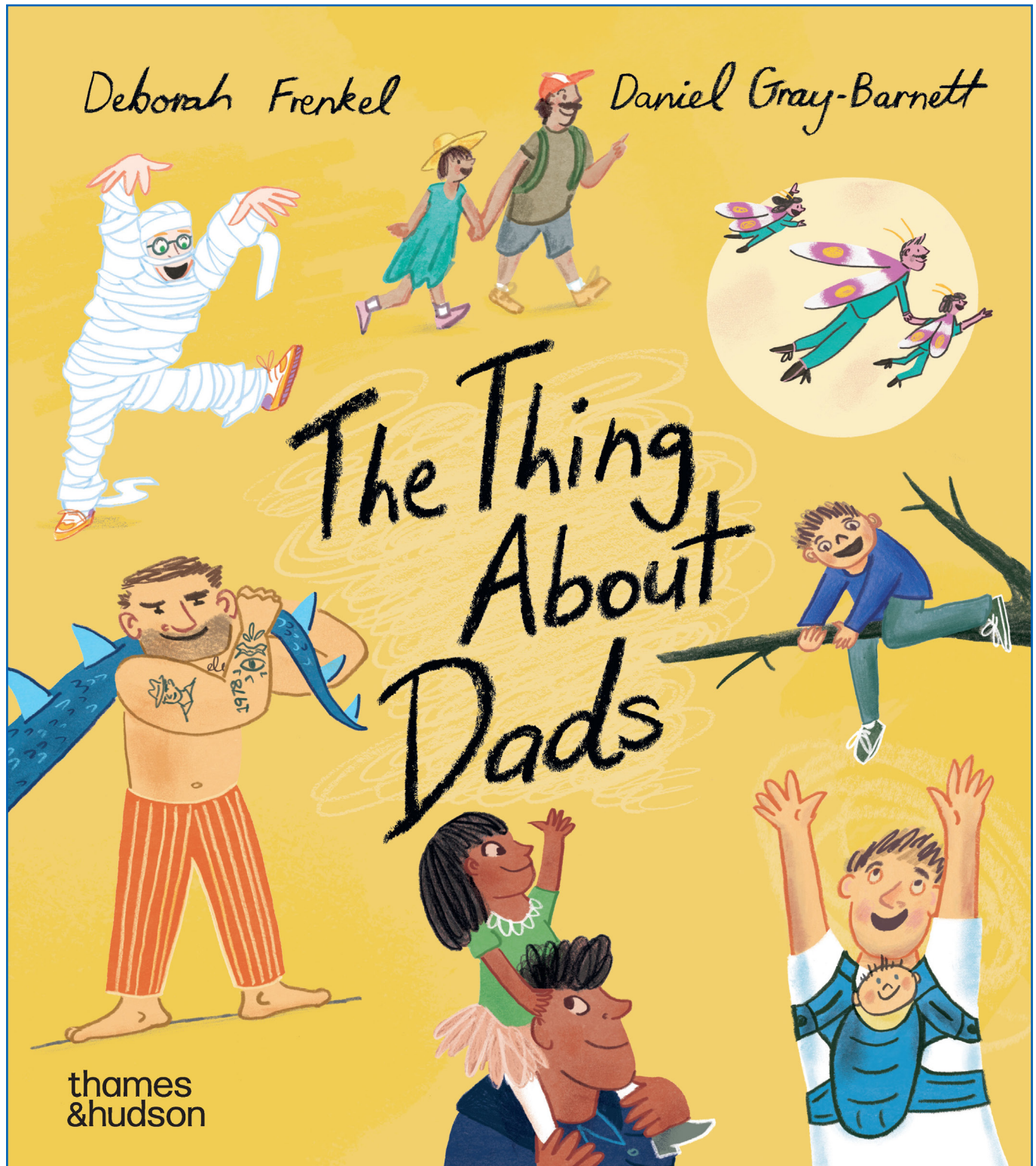
Cross-curriculum links

- The book supports discussions around diversity and inclusion
- Respect for different experiences and perspectives
- Relationships, care and community

Notes

Before reading the text

Before you start reading, look at the cover of the book.



- What do you see?
- What types of dads are shown?
- What are they doing?
- Are they being serious or funny? What does that tell you about the kind of book this will be?
- Can you find some words to describe the different dads on the cover? For example, the dad wrapped in toilet paper is funny, silly and energetic. The dad with the monster's tail across his shoulders looks big, strong and brave.
- Read the back cover information (the back cover blurb). What do you think 'dad-ing' means?

Discuss

- Do all families look the same? Create an artwork that shows your family. You might like to use photographs, drawings, paintings, collage and so on. Create a classroom wall of families.
- Who is the special dad in your life? How do they help you feel safe, loved and important?
- What makes someone a good dad or caregiver?
- What fun things do you like to do with the dad or father figure who cares for you?



During and after reading

Dad discussion

- What different kinds of dads do we meet in the story?
- How do the dads in the story show love and care?
- Which pages made you smile? Why?
- Do any of the dads in the book remind you of someone you know?
- What do you think the book is saying about families?
- What do you think 'Some dads are born and some dads are made' means? Discuss:
 - Different family structures
 - Why is love more important than all families looking the same?
 - Draw a picture of someone who cares for you. It could be a dad, stepdad, grandfather, uncle, mum, aunt, foster parent or another special grown-up

Dad hugs

'They can do big, brave things. They're strong and they're tall. But they never forget to look out for the small.'



- Each spread in the book describes different ways dads can be and the many ways they care for the people they love. Read through the descriptions on each spread and talk about how a dad, caregiver or special grown-up in your life shows these qualities.
 - Do they make you feel safe?
 - Do they help you when you are worried or upset?
 - What fun or special things do you do together?
 - How do the characters in the book make one another feel safe, happy or brave?
- Draw or write about one way your dad or caregiver looks after you. Around the picture, write or dictate:
 - They make me laugh when ...
 - We love doing ...
 - They help me when ...
 - One thing that makes them special is ...
- The book shows dads helping children feel safe and supported. Find instances of this in the book, for example, helping children climb and then helping them down, banishing the monster under the bed.
- Discuss other ways that grown-ups help children feel safe. What does it mean to care for someone?



Dad hearts

'The thing about dads is, they'll carry your bags ... but you carry their heart.'



- What do you think the author means by the words 'you carry their heart'? How can someone carry another person's heart without really holding it?
- Look closely at the illustrations that accompany this text.
 - What is happening in the pictures?
 - How do the characters show love, care and connection?
 - What details in the illustrations show how important the children are to the grown-ups who care for them? For example, what size is Dad compared to the airport window and the plane?
- Discuss how people we love can hold a special place in our hearts and how love can be shown through actions, expressions and everyday moments together.

Dad joy

'For a dad, the world's full of things worth exploring. They make even ordinary things seem un-boring.'



- The book celebrates ordinary moments becoming special.
 - Why do you think small moments can become important memories?
 - What simple things do you enjoy doing with people you love?
- As a class, brainstorm simple activities that become fun when shared with someone you love:
 - Going to the park
 - Reading stories
 - Cooking dinner
 - Dancing in the kitchen
 - Walking the dog
- Draw or write about one ordinary day that became memorable.

Dad words

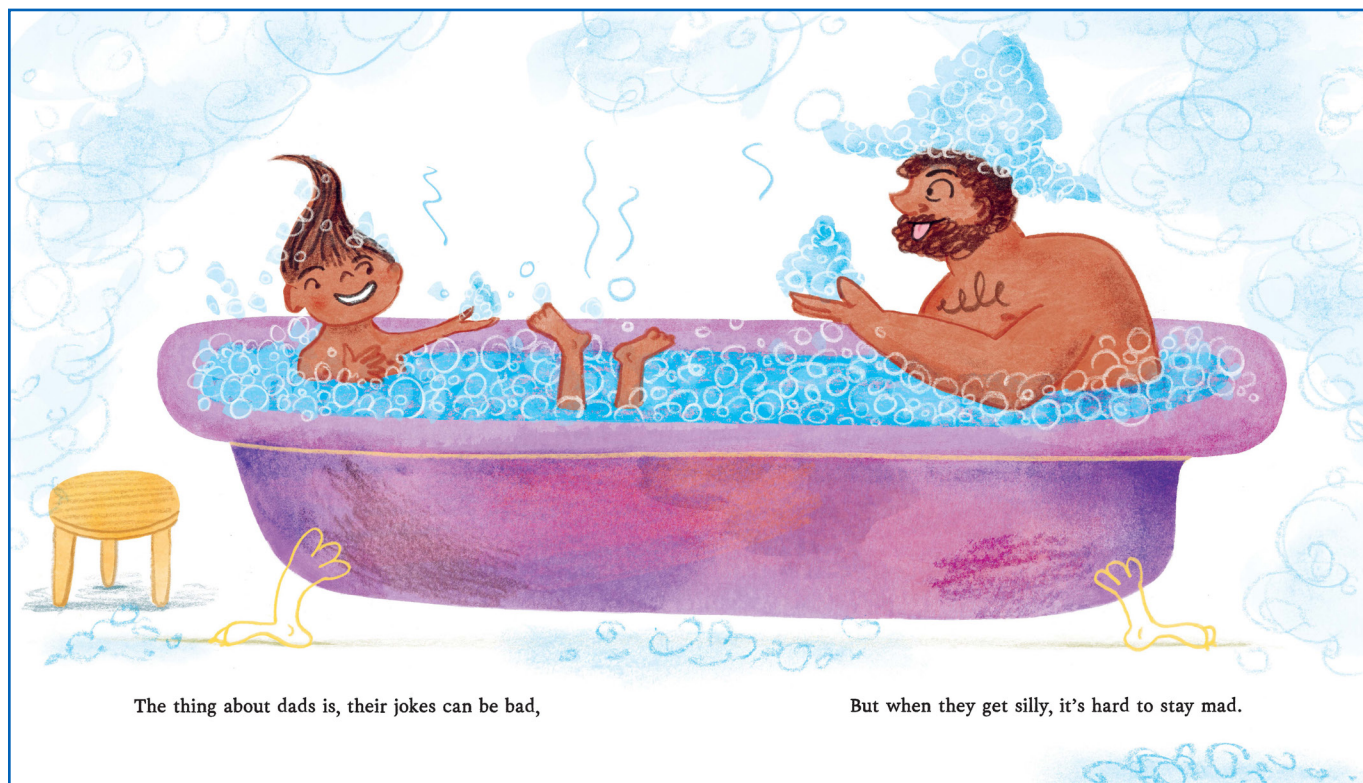
'The thing about dads is, they sometimes look tough, but they're usually filled with the softest of stuff.'



- The book uses many words and illustrations to show emotions, relationships and personality. Look through the book and find examples of characters being adventurous, caring, proud, imaginative, gentle, playful and comforting.
- Discuss what each word means. Which illustrations help show these feelings or qualities?
- The story uses rhyme throughout. Can you find rhyming pairs in the book?
- What effect do the rhymes have when the story is read aloud?
- Can you think of your own rhyming sentence about dads or a special father figure?
- 'The thing about dads is ...' Complete the sentence using rhyme.
- Discuss any repeated phrases in the story.
- Why do authors repeat words or sentence patterns?
- How does repetition make the story fun to read aloud?

Dad jokes

'The thing about dads is, their jokes can be bad, but when they get silly, it's hard to stay mad.'



Q: Why do cows wear bells?

A: Because their horns don't work!

This is what is known as a 'dad joke' – a silly, playful joke that often makes people laugh and groan at the same time. Dad jokes are usually simple, predictable and full of puns or wordplay.

- Have you ever heard a joke that made you roll your eyes and laugh at the same time? Share your favourite dad jokes with the class. Then work together to create a class book of dad jokes. You could:
 - Write and illustrate your joke
 - Design a funny cover
 - Vote for the silliest joke
- Dad jokes often use puns. A pun is a joke that plays with words that have double meanings or sound alike. For example:

Q. Why was six afraid of seven?

A. Because seven eight (ate) nine!

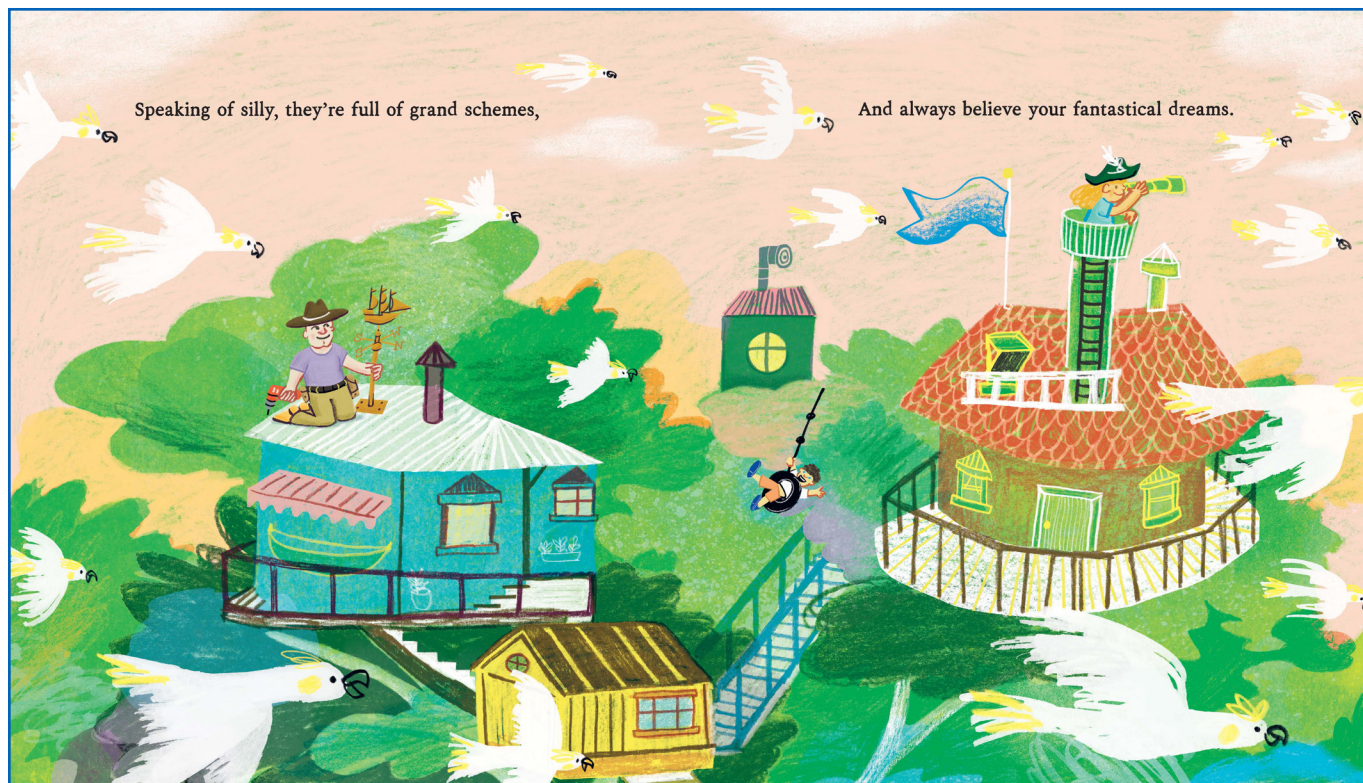
Q. What do you call a bear with no teeth?

A. A gummy bear!

Can you invent your own punny joke? Add it to the class joke book.

Dad schemes

'Speaking of silly, they're full of grand schemes, and always believe your fantastical dreams.'

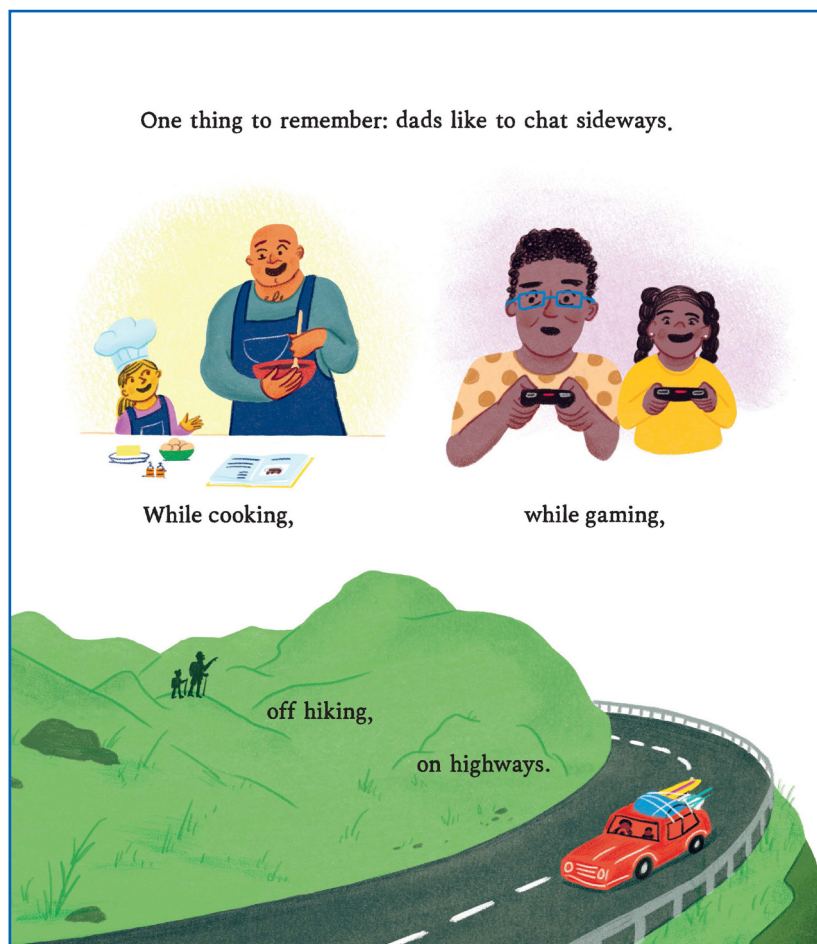


- The illustrations in *The Thing About Dads* move between everyday life and imagination, especially during moments of play, storytelling and adventure. Some scenes feel realistic, while others become wonderfully dreamlike and fantastical.
 - Which illustrations look like real-life moments?
 - Which illustrations feel imaginative, magical or dreamlike?
 - How can you tell the difference? Think about the colours, characters, costumes, expressions and settings.
 - Why do you think imagination is important?
 - How can imagination make ordinary days more exciting or fun?
- Some dads and caregivers are full of 'grand schemes' – exciting ideas, silly plans and imaginative adventures.
 - Is your dad, grandparent or caregiver full of grand schemes?
 - What funny, creative or adventurous things do they like to do?
 - Have you ever invented a game, story or adventure together?
- Look closely at the page where the text says 'And always believe your fantastical dreams.'
 - What is happening in the illustration?
 - Which parts seem realistic and which parts seem imaginary?
 - How do the illustrations show encouragement, creativity and playfulness?

- Imagine your own fantastical dream coming true.
 - Where would you go?
 - Who would come with you?
 - What magical creatures, vehicles or places might you discover?
- Draw yourself going on a fantastical adventure with your dad, grandfather or another special person in your life. You might fly through space, ride dragons, sail with pirates and so on. Add labels, speech bubbles or a short sentence describing your adventure.

Dad talk

'One thing to remember: dads like to chat sideways. While cooking, while gaming, off hiking, on highways.'



- Why can it sometimes feel easier to talk while walking, driving or playing?
- What activities help you talk and connect with people?
- Interview a family member or caregiver while doing a shared activity, then report back to the class.

We are all family

'Some dads are born and some dads are made.'



The book celebrates the many different ways families can look and the many different dads who care for us and make us feel loved.

- Do you think someone has to be a biological father to be a dad? Why or why not?
- What qualities make someone a caring and supportive dad or caregiver?
- Every family is unique. As a class, create a chart showing the many different kinds of families that exist. For example:
 - Some families are big.
 - Some families are small.
 - Some children live with one parent.
 - Some children live with grandparents or other relatives.
 - Some children have two dads or two mums.
 - Some children have stepfamilies.
- Discuss how families are made up of people who love, support and care for one another. Although families may look different, all families are special.
- Draw a picture of the people who are your family. Include anyone who plays an important part in your life.

Grandads

'The thing about dads – they've got dads of their own. So they know time is fast and one day you'll be grown.'



- Why might parents and grandparents feel emotional watching children grow up?
- What special memories do you share with a grandfather or older person in your life?
- How are grandfathers, parents and children connected across generations?
- What kinds of things can grandparents teach younger people?
- Talk with a grandparent or older family member about what life was like when they were young. You could ask:
 - What games did you play?
 - What was school like?
 - What was your favourite thing to do?
 - What advice would you give children today?
- Draw or write about something interesting you learned.

Dad-ing is . . .

'One thing about dad-ing: there's all kinds of ways.'



- The book uses playful language around the word 'dad-ing'. Invent your own '-ing' phrases, for example:
 - Dad-ing is pancake-making.
 - Dad-ing is bedtime-story-reading.
 - Dad-ing is piggyback-riding.Illustrate your sentence.
- 'Dad-ing' is a made-up word. Can you think of a made-up word to describe your dad or how he looks after you?

Picture perfect

- Look closely at the illustrations throughout the book. How would you describe the illustrator's style? Is it realistic, playful, energetic, whimsical or exaggerated?
- What colours are used? How do these colours make you feel?
- Which illustrations feel busy and energetic? Which illustrations feel calm, quiet or comforting?
- How do the characters' facial expressions and body language show emotions such as excitement, silliness, love, pride or tiredness?
- How does the illustrator show movement and energy in busy scenes?
- What details tell us the dads are caring and playful?
- Can you find examples where the illustrations tell us something extra that is not written in the text?
- Are there any funny or unexpected visual details hidden in the pictures?
- Which illustration is your favourite? Why?
- Create an artwork inspired by the style of the book, showing a joyful moment with family or a special person in your life. You may like to include a playful or unexpected element, just like the illustrator does.



Further activities

Acting up

- Act out scenes from the story or improvise new ones:
 - A rainy-day adventure
 - Fixing a broken toy
 - Making breakfast together
 - A silly bedtime routine

Discuss how the characters in the book show love and care through actions.

Thank you, Dad

- Create a card for your dad or a special person in your life. Draw a picture and write a special message.

Here are some ideas:

- Thank you for helping me ...
- I love when we ...
- You make me feel ...

Describing Dad

- Brainstorm adjectives (describing words) for your dad or caregiver, for example:
 - funny
 - gentle
 - playful
 - patient
 - adventurous
 - caring
 - silly

Use these words in sentences or labels around drawings.

Class book: The thing about ... Our families

- Each student contributes one page: 'The thing about my dad (or grandfather or caregiver) is ...'

Combine the pages into a class book for the library corner.



Dramatic dads

- Create actions for different 'dad-ing' activities:
 - Dressing up
 - Dancing
 - Reading
 - Building
 - Cuddling

Turn them into a movement game or circle-time activity.

- The story is perfect for expressive read-aloud sessions:
 - Act out the scenes
 - Create sound effects
 - Use different voices for funny moments
 - Freeze-frame favourite illustrations

